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MEMORIAL
OF
THE HON. JOHN ALSOP KING





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OF
THE HON. JOHN ALSOP KING

EIGHTEENTH PRESIDENT OF THE NEW YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BY
THE VERY REV. EUGENE A. HOFFMAN¹¹
D.D. (OXON.), LL.D., D.C.L.

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[The President, Recording Secretary, Treasurer, and Librarian
are members, *ex-officio*, of the Executive Committee.]

AT a stated meeting of the NEW YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY, held in its Hall, on Tuesday evening, February 5, 1901, Dean HOFFMAN read a Memorial of the Hon. JOHN ALSOP KING, late President of the Society.

On its conclusion the Librarian submitted the following resolution, which was adopted unanimously :

Resolved, That the thanks of the Society be presented to Dean HOFFMAN for his graceful and appropriate tribute to Mr. KING, late President of the Society, and that a copy be requested for publication.

Extract from the minutes.

SYDNEY H. CARNEY, JR.,
Recording Secretary.

HON. JOHN ALSOP KING.

JOHN ALSOP KING, late President of the New York Historical Society, departed this life on Wednesday, November 21, 1900.

He was descended from an English family, the first member of which in this country, John King, came from Kent, England, about the year 1700, and settled in Boston. John King left, by his second wife, several children, of whom the eldest, Richard, was born in Boston in 1718.

Richard King received a liberal education, which prepared him for the active duties of his later years. In the spring of 1745, on the invitation of Governor Shirley, of Massachusetts, he was actively engaged in raising men to join him in the famous expedition sent against Cape Breton, which resulted in the capture of the fortress of Louisburg. Although he devoted the later years of his life to mercantile pursuits, being the largest exporter of lumber in the State of Maine (then part of the Province of Massachusetts), the fragments of his writings which remain "evinced his familiarity with the ancient classics, his political sagacity, his prudence and solid common-sense."

By his first wife, who was Isabella Bragdon, of York, Me., he had three children, the eldest being Rufus, the grandfather of our late President.

Rufus King was born in Scarborough, Me., March 24, 1755. He entered Harvard College at the age of eighteen, and although of a susceptible and ardent temperament, and sharing in the opposition to the measures of the British Government, he seems to have pursued his studies with diligence, without suffering the excitement of the times to interfere with his education. On the resumption of the academic exercises at Cambridge after the occupation of the university buildings for military purposes, he was graduated with much distinction in 1777. He then pursued the study of law in Newburyport, Mass., under the direction of Theophilus Parsons, afterward Chief Justice of Massachusetts. Two years later we find him attached to the expedition of Governor Sullivan to take Rhode Island, and from this time forward he was actively engaged in the service of his country. He was a member of the General Court of Massachusetts in 1783, and a representative from New England in the Continental Congress, sitting at Trenton, N. J., from 1784 to 1786, where "his vigorous oratory and a rare combination of personal and intellectual endowments made him a prominent figure." In this Congress he introduced a resolution to adopt an act prohibiting slavery. In 1787, as a member of the Constitutional Convention, he drafted an instrument which bound the States for the first time in one strong federation.

On March 31, 1786, he was married to Mary, only child of John Alsop, of New York. The Alsops were descended from the English family of that name, who came from Alsop, in Derbyshire, and settled in Newtown, Long Island, in the seventeenth century. John Alsop was the grandson

of the first Alsop who settled here. He became eminent as a politician, represented the City of New York in the Colonial Legislature and, was a delegate to the first Continental Congress in 1774. He was not in Congress when the independence of the American colonies was declared, but was at the time a member of the New York Convention, and on the adoption of the declaration of independence by the convention, he resigned his seat. He survived the Revolution, living in New York until his death, in 1794. He was a devoted churchman, and for many years a vestryman of Trinity Church, New York.

Rufus King was described at the time of his marriage as passing for "the most eloquent man in the United States," but so modest that "he appeared ignorant of his own worth;" while his bride, "a most estimable lady," we are told, was remarkable for her personal beauty: "her motions were all grace, her bearing gracious, her voice musical, and her education exceptional." After their marriage they resided with her father, Mr. John Alsop, in his house at the corner of Maiden Lane and William Street, and mingled in the best society of the metropolis. The diary of President Washington at this time makes frequent mention of the young couple, who were constant visitors at the Presidential mansion.

Mr. King, having thus become a citizen of New York, was in 1789 chosen to the State Legislature, where "he received the unexampled welcome of an immediate election, with General Schuyler, to the Senate of the United States." He was very rarely absent from his seat, and efficiently promoted the

establishment of the new government and the measures and policy of what was known as the Federal party. He earnestly advocated the sending of Mr. Jay as a special envoy to England to settle the questions threatening the peace between the United States and Great Britain, and when a treaty was made with the British Government he defended it in the Senate, in public meetings, and in writing, being the author of a number of influential letters on the subject, published by Alexander Hamilton, under the signature of "Camillus."

He was re-elected to the United States Senate in 1795 for a term of six years, but resigned in 1796, having been in that year appointed by President Washington Minister Plenipotentiary to Great Britain—a nomination he had previously declined. He was recommended for this post by Alexander Hamilton as "a gentleman of integrity, fortune, agreeable address, good judgment, and sound morals, and one whose situation, as well as character, afforded good ground of confidence." He remained at the Court of St. James during the remainder of the administration of Washington, throughout the whole of that of Adams, and a part of that of Jefferson—until 1804. During his term of office he secured many important modifications of the commercial relations between the two countries, and having won the confidence of the British Government by his intelligent, courteous, and firm presentation of the matters under discussion, claimed and obtained for his country the respect accorded to it as one of the important powers of the world.

Returning to America in 1804, he carried out a long-cherished plan of retiring from public life by

purchasing the property at Jamaica, Long Island, which has since been known as the "King Manor." This he made his home, and here he occupied himself in its improvement, in hunting and fishing, in the cultivation of his already well-stored mind, in the study and observation of the political questions of the day, and in a large and extensive correspondence. The manor is now the property of the city, and is leased at a moderate rental to the "King Manor Association of Long Island."

In 1813 he was again elected United States Senator, and was nominated for the office of Governor of New York, and also for the Presidency of the United States, in opposition to James Monroe. In the Senate he continued his efforts to put an end to slavery and to prevent its extension into newly admitted States. At the close of his fourth Senatorial term, though desirous to retire again from public life, he was prevailed upon in 1825 by President John Quincy Adams to accept the post of Minister to Great Britain; but after a year's service his health failed, and he returned home. He died in New York, April 29, 1827, universally beloved and respected.

The sons of Rufus King were remarkable and accomplished men. John Alsop was Governor of the State of New York; Charles was a journalist and scholar, and the author of many valuable works, being the editor of the *New York American* from 1827 to 1845, and President of Columbia College from 1849 to 1864; and James Gore, who was Adjutant-General in the War of 1812, founded the great banking house of James Gore King & Sons, was a member of Congress from 1829 to

1851, and President of the New York Chamber of Commerce.

John Alsop King, eldest son of Rufus King, and father of our late President, was born in New York, January 3, 1788. He was educated chiefly in England, at Harrow School, where he was a class-mate of Lord Byron, and later was sent to finish his schooling at Paris. On his return to New York he studied law, and was admitted to the bar. During the War of 1812 he served as a lieutenant of cavalry, and is described as being, in his military capacity, a remarkable disciplinarian, and commanding a troop composed almost exclusively of young men from the leading families, as fine a body of men as ever paraded the streets of New York.

He married, January 3, 1810, Mary, daughter of Cornelius and Elizabeth Elmendorf Ray, by whom he had three sons and four daughters. The Rays were an old New York family, the founder of which in this country emigrated from Exeter, in Devonshire, England, at the close of the sixteenth century.

He was elected a member of the New York Legislature in 1819, and was subsequently re-elected several times, resigning his place in the State Senate in 1825 to accompany his father to the Court of St. James as Secretary of the Legation, and remaining in England as *Chargé d'Affaires* when his father was compelled on account of ill-health to return to America. In 1849 he was elected by the Whig party to Congress, where he opposed the Fugitive Slave Law very strongly, and advocated the admission of California as a free State; he was also a warm supporter of General Fremont at the Philadelphia Convention of 1856. In this year he was elected

Governor of the State of New York, giving during his term of office particular attention to educational matters and to internal reforms. He declined a re-nomination, and in 1859 retired to private life; but consented in 1861, at the urgent request of Governor Morgan, to leave his seclusion to become a member of the Peace Convention.

His later years were spent at the Manor House in Jamaica, which he had occupied since the death of his father in 1827. Here he entertained many of the political and literary celebrities of the day. He is said to have devoted much time and money to beautifying the grounds, and many of the fine old trees between the house and the street were planted by him. He was a prominent member of the Episcopal Church, and eminent in its councils, and was justly esteemed by all who knew him. He died at Jamaica, July 7, 1867.

I have not hesitated to recount these particulars of the ancestors of our late President, because they furnish a key to his character and life. They were all men of marked ability, devoted to the service of their country, and distinguished for their integrity of character, both in their public and private lives.

John Alsop King, Jr., our late President, the second son of Governor John Alsop King, and Mary Ray, his wife, was born at Jamaica, N. Y., on the 14th day of July, 1817. His early years were passed at Jamaica, where he was educated at the Union Hall Academy, the classical school of Dr. Louis E. A. Eigenbrodt. At the early age of fifteen he entered Harvard College, in the sophomore class, and was graduated from that institution with

much credit. For a short time afterward he was a clerk in the house of Ebenezer Stevens, but, disliking the business, he took up the study of law, and when admitted to the bar practised his profession for several years in New York.

He married, February 21, 1839, at Hell Gate, New York, Mary Colden Rhineland, the only daughter of Philip and Mary Colden Hoffman Rhineland, of New York. Soon after this he went to Europe, spending some years in travel there, a visit which was several times repeated. His last journey extended to Egypt, where he and his family remained for a winter.

In 1854 he bought a beautiful point of land on Long Island Sound, part of the Hewlett Point property, where he built a house and made his home for the remainder of his life. His tastes led him to become a member of the agricultural societies of Queens County, and he took an active part in their proceedings, as well as a deep interest in all the affairs of the neighborhood, both political and religious. Here, as elsewhere, his genial disposition and courteous manners won for him the esteem of those with whom he was brought into contact.

The Republican Party of that day was guided by the principles which he had inherited, and he became interested in promoting them. His first public appointment was as Presidential Elector in 1872; this was followed by an election to the State Senate, in which he served during the years 1874-1875. He was a zealous supporter and defender of the Erie Canal, and of the constitutional amendments which brought about many reforms in the State government. With the aid of the members of the

First District, he succeeded in securing the repeal of the infamous act of 1868 by which, unknown to the owners, the salt meadow water fronts of Staten and Long Islands had been sold for a trifling sum to a land company. For his services in procuring the passage of the act establishing the Court of Arbitration he received a vote of thanks from the New York Chamber of Commerce. In the year 1876 he was nominated in his district for the office of Representative in the National Congress, but was defeated, as he was also in 1880, the district being strongly Democratic.

In 1881 Mr. King was appointed by Governor Cornell the Commissioner for the State of New York to receive and extend the courtesies and hospitalities of the State to the delegation from France and the other foreign guests invited by the United States to take part at Yorktown in the centennial celebration. Both duties were faithfully performed.

From that time, though still interested in the welfare of his party, he was no longer prominent in politics, but devoted himself to other pursuits for which he had long felt a deep concern. These were chiefly in connection with the church in which he was brought up, and which was that of his affections, the Protestant Episcopal Church. His desire to promote its interests and to do good in his generation was shown by his connecting himself with Zion Church at Little Neck, Long Island, of which he was for many years a warden, and afterward by his materially aiding in building the Church of All Saints at Great Neck, of which he was every year elected a warden up to the close of his life. He was a delegate to the Dioc-

esan Convention of New York, from Grace Church, Jamaica, from 1850 to 1866; and, after the division of the Diocese of New York, a delegate to the Long Island Diocesan Convention, from Zion Church, Little Neck, from 1863 to 1887, and from All Saints' Church, Great Neck, from 1888 to the date of his death. During all these years he was a member of important committees of the diocesan conventions, and was always present at their meetings, except when absent from the country. He was a Trustee of the Fund for Aged and Infirm Clergymen from the year 1869, and a Trustee of the General Theological Seminary from the year 1872. Both of these offices, as well as those of member of the Board of Managers of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society and Trustee of King Hall, Washington, D. C., founded and largely endowed by himself, for the higher education of the colored race, he held up to the time of his death. He was a deputy to the Federal Council on every occasion, from its formation in 1871, and a deputy to eight successive Triennial General Conventions of the Church. He was also a lay member of the Cathedral Chapter of Long Island, and, following the example of his ancestors, he was a liberal benefactor of Grace Church, Jamaica. He and his wife were greatly interested in the New York Blind Asylum, of which he was a manager, and it has been truly said that in all his efforts to promote benevolent objects his wife and daughters were ever ready to join with him.

Mr. King became a member of the New York Historical Society in 1881. In 1887 he was elected its eighteenth President, and, devoting himself to its

interests, was annually re-elected to the same office. He delivered the address at the eighty-third anniversary of the founding of the society, November 15, 1887, the subject of his address being "The Framing of the Federal Constitution and the Causes leading thereto." This address was published by the society. At the meeting held June 5, 1900, Mr. King presented and read a memorial of Robert Schell, late treasurer of the society.

He was very seldom missing from the presidential chair at the monthly meetings of the society, and was a frequent visitor to the library, looking over, with Mr. Kelby, the librarian, the latest additions to the books and manuscripts. The last time he presided was at the meeting on October 2d. Mr. King's elder brother, Dr. Charles Ray King, is the oldest member of the society.

Our late President was deeply interested in procuring a new building for the society, and it was under his inspiration that ten full city lots in the block between Seventy-sixth and Seventy-seventh streets, west of the Park, was purchased as a site for the purpose. He had intended, early in the new year, to call a meeting of the society, to take steps for raising the money to build at least a part of it.

This is but an imperfect summary of the many good deeds of our friend's busy and well-spent life. It reveals a man of marked manliness of character, with a singularly sweet and loving disposition. Holding decided views, conscientiously maintained, on questions which came before him, they were not put forward without a due regard for those who differed from him. Notwithstanding the multiplicity of works in which he engaged, they were always

accompanied with such modesty and reticence that few even of his intimate friends were aware of the energy and punctuality with which he devoted himself to duties which he voluntarily assumed for the good of others. Of all the boards and committees of which he was a member he was never absent from a meeting, unless prevented by other imperative duties. For twenty years it has been my privilege to sit beside him in the Board of Managers of our Missionary Society. In all that time I have been a constant observer of the careful and conscientious manner in which he discharged its important responsibilities. In addition to all these public duties, how many days and hours he devoted to personal acts of kindness will never be known until that day when their recipients will rise up and call him blessed. His heart and his head were always open to every appeal of suffering and want.

Such was the honorable and noble life of our late President—devoted to the good of others, free in every stage of it from the reproach of weakness or of personal ends, marked throughout by high aims, conscientiously carried out, by an enlightened love of goodness, and by the unhesitating devotion of the individual, his faculties, and his possessions to the service of God and his fellow-men.

In private life he was what we are accustomed to describe as a gentleman of the old school. As the Bishop of Long Island has truthfully recorded: "Manners with him was a phase of morals. Courtesy and politeness were in his view only other names for benevolence in small things. He not only believed in saying what is true and doing what is right, but in saying and doing it with kindly re-

gard to the feelings and circumstances of others. His gracious affability was more than a sentiment, because it stood for the dignity of a principle."

Lastly, I do not hesitate to hold up his life as a pattern of an humble, sincere, and devout Christian man. Accepting with his whole heart the fundamental truths of the Christian faith, as set forth in the ancient creeds, illustrating them in his daily walk and conversation, his constant aim was, as the Lord requires: "to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with his God."

And so when the end came it was in keeping with his life. As every Christian should desire to die—surrounded by his children, with mental abilities unabated, receiving from a beloved pastor the last *viaticum*,—he calmly fell asleep, and was "gathered unto his fathers, having the testimony of a good conscience, in the communion of the Catholic Church, in the confidence of a certain faith, in the comfort of a reasonable, religious, and holy hope, in favor with his God, and in perfect charity with the world."

His funeral services were held in St. Thomas's Church, which, though the weather was very stormy, was filled with the representatives of the various institutions for which he had labored, and large numbers of the leading men of the city. His body was laid in the grave by the side of his ancestors and kindred, under the shadow of the old church at Jamaica, Long Island, in sure and certain hope of the resurrection and the life of the world to come. There we left it with the words on our lips and in our hearts: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord; even so saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labors."

PROCEEDINGS OF THE SOCIETY

AT a special meeting of the Executive Committee of the New York Historical Society held Thursday, November 22, 1900, the following resolutions were adopted by a rising vote :

Resolved, That the Executive Committee has received with profound sensibility the announcement of the death of the Hon. John Alsop King, President of the society.

Resolved, That this committee will attend the funeral services at St. Thomas's Church, Fifth Avenue and Fifty-third Street, on Saturday, November 24th, at 9.30 A.M., and respectfully requests the members of the society to join in this tribute of respect.

Resolved, That the Very Rev. Eugene A. Hoffman, D.D., be invited to prepare and present to the society, at some future meeting, a memorial of the Hon. John Alsop King, President of the society.

Resolved, That Mr. Nicholas Fish, Mr. Frederic Wendell Jackson and Dr. Sydney H. Carney, Jr., be appointed a committee to prepare suitable resolutions on the death of Mr. King, to be reported at the next meeting of the society.

Resolved, That the building of the society be closed Saturday, November 24.

Extract from the Minutes,

DANIEL PARISH, JR.,
Secretary.

AT a stated meeting of the New York Historical Society, held on Tuesday evening, December 4, 1900, Mr. Nicholas Fish, Mr. Frederic Wendell Jackson, and

Dr. Sydney H. Carney, Jr., the committee appointed to prepare resolutions on the death of Mr. King, reported the following preamble and resolutions, which were adopted by a rising vote :

Since its last regular meeting, in November, it has been the fate of the New York Historical Society to mourn the loss of its venerable President. John Alsop King died in this city on Wednesday, November 21, 1900, in the eighty-fourth year of his age. He became a member of this society in the year 1881. In 1887 he was elected its President, and was annually re-elected to the same office. The ability, grace, and dignity which were his characteristics in the discharge of the duties of his office are known to us all. Endowed by nature with a kindly and generous disposition, his fine qualities were further developed by a classical education, and by intercourse with the leading men of the world. Born at Jamaica, L. I., on July 14, 1817, he graduated at Harvard University in 1835, studied the profession of law, and afterward was chosen Presidential Elector in 1872. He served as a member of the New York State Senate 1874-75.

During his whole association with the New York Historical Society, either as member or officer, he devoted himself to its interests in a singular degree. To his untiring efforts the society owes the magnificent site selected for its future home, and it was the dream and hope of his last years that a building worthy of this venerable society be erected thereon.

Fully realizing the great loss it has sustained, the society desires to record the sincere respect, gratitude, and affection with which it cherishes the memory of its deceased President, and it is therefore

Resolved, That in the death of the Hon. John Alsop King the New York Historical Society laments the loss of an accomplished presiding officer, whose courtesy, tact, and sound judgment have stamped its proceedings with dignity; whose personality contributed largely to its

prosperity, and whose unselfish devotion to its interest will be held in grateful memory by every member of this society.

Resolved, That an attested copy of this minute be communicated to the family of Mr. King, with the expression of the sincere sympathy of the New York Historical Society in their deep sorrow.

Extract from the Minutes,

SYDNEY H. CARNEY,

Recording Secretary.

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